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THE

BLACK PRINCE,

A TRUE STORY:

BEING

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND DEATH

OF

NAIMBANNA,

AN AFRICAN KING'S SON,

Who arrived in England in the Year 1791, and set Sail on
his Return in June, 1793.



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THE
BLACK PRINCE,
A TRUE STORY.



IN Africa, the country where the negroes live, and from which slaves are taken, there was a king who was not a Christian, but who was a better man (to their shame be it spoken) than many who call themselves Christians. Though he could neither read nor write, he had good sense enough to grieve for the misery and ignorance of his poor countrymen, and he was desirous of doing them good if he but knew how.

At length a number of English gentlemen, who had at heart the same thing, formed themselves into a company for the purpose of putting a stop to the trade in slaves, and spreading in Africa the blessings of the gospel.

Their plan was to form a settlement in the river Sierra Leone, where the above-mentioned king lived, and they accordingly sent over an agent to talk with the king, and to procure his consent.

The good old king was very glad when he heard of their intentions; he easily saw that such a settlement would produce great benefit to his country; he therefore became the staunch friend of the Company, and also of the Settlement, which was soon after formed, and he continued so to the day of his death.

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The king had thought before this time that there were none but bad people in England, for to use his own words, he had *never before seen any Englishmen who were not bad people*, but he now found, that though there were many wicked people in England, there were many good people also. Being informed that what made the people in England good was the Christian Religion, he resolved to send thither his son, about twenty-three years of age, who was put under the care of the Sierra Leone Company's agent, and by him brought to England, the Company readily undertaking the charge of his education.

Naimbanna, for so he was called, arrived in England, in a vessel called the Lapwing, in the year 1791, and proper persons were chosen to instruct him in reading, writing, and other parts of education: but before we proceed to give an account of the progress he made during his stay in this country, it may be proper to make the reader acquainted with his character at the time of his landing. His person was not handsome, but his manners were extremely pleasing, and his dispositions kind and affectionate: at the same time, his feelings were quick and jealous, and he was very violent in his temper, as well as proud and disdainful. Though he laboured under great disadvantages from the want of early education, yet he shewed signs of a good understanding, and he appeared to be very sharp-sighted in finding out people's real character.

He had not been long in England before a thirst of knowledge was found to be a leading feature in his character. His teachers have said that he would often urge them to prolong the time employed

in reading; and that he was always thankful to any one who would assist him in learning any thing that was useful. He was never led into company where the time was wasted in idle talk without being sorry, and when left to himself, he would employ not less than eight or ten hours of the day in reading.

As it was the main object of the gentlemen to whose care he had been entrusted, to give him right views of Christianity, pains were taken to convince him that the Bible was the word of God, and he received it as such with great reverence and simplicity: "When I found (said he) all good men minding the Bible, and calling it the word of God, and all bad men disregarding it, I then was sure that the Bible must be what good men called it, the word of God." But not content with the report of others, he read the Bible for himself. He would sometimes complain of being fatigued with other studies, but even when he was most fatigued, if asked to read a little in the Scriptures, he always expressed his readiness by some emotion of joy: he used to say, that he was sure of meeting with something in the Bible which suited every case, and shewed him what was right and what was wrong; and that he likewise found in it good examples to encourage him to do what was right, and bad examples to deter him from doing what was wrong. In short, he was not one of those who read the Bible, and think little or nothing about what they read, but he considered it as the rule of his life; and if at any time his behaviour was amiss, and a text of Scripture was mentioned, which proved it to be so, he would immediately submit to its authority. Nor was his regard for the Bible merely

of an outward kind, it plainly affected his heart. He had tried, when in Africa, (to use his own words) to *make himself as proud as he could*, and he thought it great to revenge himself on any one who had done him an injury; but from the Bible he acquired such humble views of himself, that he was led to see his need of Christ as his Saviour, and the necessity of relying on him as the ground of acceptance with God. Humility was a quality which he found it hard to attain; but before his departure from England, not only his pride, but also his revengeful spirit had become hateful to him. The progress he had made in subduing his passions, during his short stay in this country, considering the natural violence of his temper, was considerable. He always expressed sorrow when he had been hasty or passionate in his conduct: as he became more acquainted with christian principles, he acquired more courtesy and delicacy of manners, some degree of which was indeed natural to him; and the superstitious belief in witchcraft, to which Africans are so prone, gradually left him.

He paid great respect to the teachers of Christianity, whom he wished much to invite over to his country; took great delight in the exercises of devotion, and would talk on religious subjects with much openness and simplicity, and without any mixture of enthusiasm. Love and gratitude to God, who had delivered him from the state of darkness in which, in common with millions of his countrymen, he had been lately plunged, were strongly impressed on his mind, and had a strong and abiding effect on the whole of his conduct.

His tenderness of conscience was very striking, and it seemed to have become his desire on all

occasions, to know what line of conduct was most agreeable to the word of God: when he could determine that point, he would not hesitate about resolving to pursue it.

The reader will have a better view of the character of this black Prince from the following stories of him, the truth of which is well established.

His father had seen so much drunkenness among the English slave traders on the coast of Africa, that he concluded drunkenness was very common in England, and in order to prevent his sons falling into that abominable practice, he laid a command on him, (stating at the same time the ground of his fears) that when he came to England, he should not be prevailed upon to drink spirits of any kind, nor to drink more than a glass or two of wine, at a meal.

When young Naimbanna found how strongly obedience to parents is enjoined in the Bible, he regarded this command of his father as sacred, nor was he ever known to violate it.

Soon after he came to London, he was taken to see St. Paul's, the grandeur of which it was thought would astonish him, but to the surprise of the gentleman who went with him, on getting to the upper part of the building, terror seemed to swallow up every other feeling; he made the utmost haste to descend, nor did he stop till he found himself safely landed in the church-yard, when in a very earnest manner he thanked God for having spared him. When asked the reason of this strange conduct, he said, that on looking down from the top of St. Paul's, he was so struck with the nearness of death and judgment, that he lost sight of every

other object, that he never felt before how much he deserved punishment at the hands of God, and that he only thought of escaping lest such a signal punishment as that of falling from the top of St. Paul's should overtake him.

He was present once in the House of Commons during a debate on the slave trade. He there heard a gentleman, who spoke in favour of the trade, say some things very degrading to the characters of his countrymen. He was so enraged at this, that on coming out of the House, he cried out with great vehemence, "I will kill that fellow wherever I meet him, for he has told lies of my country." he was put in mind of the christian duty of forgiving his enemies; on which he answered nearly in the following words:—"If a man should rob me of my money, I can forgive him; if a man should shoot at me, I can forgive him; if a man should sell me and all my family to a slave ship, so that we should pass all the rest of our lives in slavery in the West Indies, I can forgive him; but, (added he with much emotion) if a man takes away the character of the people of my country, I never can forgive him." Being asked why he would not extend his forgiveness to one who took away the character of the people of his country, he answered,—"If a man should try to kill me, or should sell my family for slaves, he would do an injury to as many as he might kill or sell, but if any one takes away the character of black people, that man injures black people all over the world; and when he has once taken away their character, there is nothing which he may not do to black people ever after. That man, for instance, will beat black men, and say, O, it is only

if a white man beat a black man, why should I not beat him?" That man will make slaves of black people; for when he has taken away their character, he will say, "O, they are only black people, why should not I make them slaves." That man will take away all the people of Africa, if he can catch them, and if you ask him, but why do you take away all these people? he will say, "O, they are only black people, they are not like white people, why should not I take them?" That is the reason why I cannot forgive the man who takes away the character of the people of my country."

He was then told that it would be very wicked to kill this gentleman, or even not to forgive him, seeing the Scriptures said, "Forgive your enemies."—"Vengeance is mine, I will repay," saith the Lord." This immediately quieted his rage, and he became as calm as a lamb, nor was used afterwards to express the least anger against the gentleman who had so much offended him.

At another time, when he saw a man beat his horse about the head and otherwise use it ill, he became very angry, and talked of getting a gun to shoot the man, for he was sure he deserved it, and also of carrying a gun always about him to shoot such bad people. As soon, however, as a passage of Scripture, which condemned such violence was mentioned to him, his anger ceased, and he became sorry for it.

The delicacy of his mind appears from the following circumstance: while reading a book to a lady, which had been recommended to him as a good book, he met with a word, supposed by him to convey an impure idea, on which he instantly stopped, and shut the book without assigning any cause. The

lady soon after quitted the room, when his displeasure, which her presence had kept him from expressing, broke forth; he dashed the book, with a degree of fury which astonished the gentleman who was present, against the wall of the room, declaring that the man who wrote the book, ought to be punished for deceiving people, and putting bad thoughts into their heads; and as for the book itself, that he should burn it wherever he might happen to meet with it. He was soon convinced of the impropriety of his warmth, but he continued to regard the book, and its author, as highly blamable.

He was so concerned for the credit of his country, and so fearful of the consequence of drawing contempt upon it, that, except with particular persons, he was averse from giving very minute accounts of the state of African manners, arts, cultivation, or society. On the same account, he studiously avoided strong marks of wonder at any thing he saw in England, lest an inference should be drawn from it to the disadvantage of Africa. When he chose, however, to be unreserved in talking about his country, he was never known to violate truth in the accounts he gave.

Among the difficulties which his new view of things laid upon him, one respected his wives. He had two while in Africa, but he clearly saw the New Testament allowed only one; his difficulty was, to know which of them it was right for him to keep. He thought at first it would be right to keep her whom he had first married; but then he considered that she had borne him no child, and that the second (who was besides the wife of his affections) had brought him a son; this last cir-

cumstance seemed to have decided the question in favour of the second; he declared himself ready, however, to make a sacrifice of his feelings, should it appear right to keep the first in preference.

In about a year and a half after his arrival in England, he could read fluently, (though, at first, he knew little of the English tongue,) and could write a letter. He had also made himself acquainted with common arithmetic, and the first elements of mathematics, and had besides imbibed much general knowledge.

While he thus went on improving, the news of his father's death reached England, and called him suddenly to Sierra Leone. He felt much anxiety when he was on the eve of returning, from the variety of new duties, which the deplorable state of his country seemed to lay upon him. He was very desirous that his future conduct might not discredit his new religion; and it appeared to those with whom he conversed, that there was no personal sacrifice which he was not ready to make for the sake of Christianity. To have the honour of becoming himself a teacher of it, seemed to be the summit of his wishes.

In the month of June 1793, he embarked on board of one of the Sierra Leone Company's vessels, called from him, the Naimbanna, after having taken an affectionate leave of all his friends in England.

During the passage, his mind was almost constantly employed in pondering over those difficulties which he thought he should have to combat on his return to Africa, and in devising the means of overcoming them. Numberless were the plans which he formed for the purpose of spreading the light of

the gospel among his rude countrymen; though he seemed at the same time to suffer much uneasiness, from a fear of disappointment, which became stronger as he approached his native shores. He had left England in perfect health, but on reaching a warmer climate, he was much affected by the heat, and caught a violent cold, which began with pains in his throat and head, and ended in a fever, which the continual working of his mind had probably contributed much to produce. He was frequently light-headed, and his intervals of sense were short and few, but they afforded to those around him striking proofs of a humble trust in the mercies of God through Christ, and of a perfect resignation to his will. During one of those intervals he called to his bed-side a fellow-passenger, and observing to him, that he began to think he should be called hence, before he had an opportunity of telling his mother and friends what mercies God had shewn him, and what obligations he lay under to the Sierra Leone Company, he begged of the gentleman to write his will, the substance of which was, that his brother should take charge of his property, till his son, then a child, came of age; and, in the mean time, should reimburse the Sierra Leone Company for the sums advanced by them on his account.

To this he subjoined a strong request that his brother should, as far as in him lay, oppose the slave trade, and for the satisfaction of his friends, he added, "That nothing may be imputed to the Sierra Leone Company by any evil-minded men, whose interest may oppose that of the worthy Company, I here declare, in the presence of that God, in whom I place my trust, that during my

stay in England, I always enjoyed very good health, and received the greatest civilities from all those under whose care I was, and at my leaving England I was in perfect health.

When the vessel got to Sierra Leone, he had become insensible to every thing that passed around him, except for very short intervals. He was taken ashore to the governor's house at Freetown, where his mother, with a brother, and sister of his, and some other of his relations, to whom notice of his dangerous state had been sent, soon after appeared. The distracted looks of his mother, and the wildness of his sister's grief on seeing him, affected every one; but when at length they perceived that he breathed no more, their shrieks and cries were distressing beyond measure. He died about twelve hours after coming on shore.

Thus ended the days of this amiable and enlightened African, from whose labours extensive good might have been expected. But before we proceed to make a few reflections on this story, it will be well to notice two memorandums which were found in his pocket-book after his death, and which serve to confirm what has been already said of the tenderness of his conscience, and the purity of his manners.

The first was written in consequence of his falling into some company where profane and obscene conversation had passed, and was as follows:—"I shall take care of this company, which I now fall into, for they swear a good deal, and talked all manner of wickedness and filthy. All these things—can I be able to resist that temptation?—No, I cannot, but the Lord will deliver me."

The other was written after he had been some time at sea, and had made some unavailing remonstrances to the captain on the profaneness of his crew; and in it, he declared, that "if the crews of other vessels should be like the crew of the Naimbanna, he should never think of coming to England, though he had friends there as dear to him as the last words of his father."

May we not conclude, from the above story, that God has given to the most rude and savage people, minds capable of knowing, loving, and serving him. And may we not learn hence, to cherish sentiments of kindness and affection towards all men, whatever be their colour, or however low they may stand in the scale of human beings. Those, especially, who know how to estimate the blessings of religion, and who have a regard for the everlasting happiness of their fellow creatures, will be encouraged by it, to promote, with zeal, every plan which tends to introduce Christianity among the savage nations of the earth, or to remove the hindrances to its introduction. Happy, if through their instrumentality those who now sit in darkness, should be brought, like Naimbanna, to know God and themselves, and to rejoice in hope of his glory.

Let us also learn from this story, that God's ways are not as our ways. Short-sighted as we are, we were ready to conclude that this young man had been sent by heaven to be a blessing to Africa, and to spread the Christian Religion among his own countrymen. But God, who sees and knows all things, determined otherwise: He saw it right to take Naimbanna from the evil to come; thus disappointing our hopes, but, at the same time,

teaching us to check the disposition we are too apt to indulge, of prying into the secrets of heaven, and to conduct all our plans and inquiries, under a sense of our own ignorance, and in a full dependance on the over-ruling providence and righteous government of God.

May we not also draw a lesson from the conduct of the old king on this occasion. It was not the wealth, the grandeur, the learning, or the arts of England which struck him as desirable, but the religion of England. He sent his son thither, not to make a fortune, not to procure an insight into trade, not to form great connexions, but to learn the Christian Religion. How many parents are there in this country, where it is so easy to attain the means of learning the Christian Religion, who take no pains to make their children acquainted with it.

But a still more instructive lesson, and one which applies more generally, may be drawn from the conduct of the Black Prince, whose story has just been told. He comes among us rude and ignorant, with no just ideas of religion, and after having been accustomed for 23 years to indulge all his passions without any restraint. No sooner, however, is Christianity placed before him, than he is struck with its truth and beauty, and embraces it with a child-like simplicity. As he views himself in the glass of scripture, he perceives its account of human nature to be true from his own experience. Humbled under a sense of his sins and imperfections, trembling under the apprehensions of the consequences of them, and sensible of his inability to help himself, he gladly lays hold of the hope set before him, he believes the promises of God to the

penitent, and relies for salvation on Christ alone. Nor were these new views unavailing; on the contrary, they produced striking effects. In consequence of them, with the help of God's grace, he imbibes the spirit of the gospel. His prejudices are overcome, his temper is regulated, his passions curbed, his very manners are improved by it. In short, he seemed, to use the language of Scripture, "to become a new creature." Tell me, Reader, hast thou ever experienced in thyself this change which Naimbanna underwent? Remember that our Saviour has told us, that "except we be converted, and become as little children, we shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." Has thy heart been turned to fear and to love and to serve the Lord thy God, or does thy conscience witness against thee, that thou art yet a stranger to the peace and joy, as well as to the obedience of the gospel.

If the living in a christian land, and called by a christian name, thou art nevertheless no Christian, repent without delay I beseech thee. Receive, from this time the gospel as a little child. Put off that pride which stands in the way of thy repentance, and of thy salvation. Be humble and willing to learn like this Prince Naimbanna. Read, like him, the sacred Scriptures, with reverence and with prayer to God for his blessing. Soon thy days, like his, shall be numbered, and if thou, who art born in a christian land, shouldst leave the world without having ever truly known the powerful influence of Christianity, the very story which thou hast just read, shall hereafter rise up in judgment against thee.